



reed anthropology review

EPISTEMOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENTS

Jane Calderbank
Department of Anthropology
Reed College
Portland, OR 97202
CALDERJA@REED.EDU

ABSTRACT

By advocating for multimodal approaches to the disciplines, this piece contributes to the formation of alternative, resilient epistemological spaces in anthropology and ecology. Reflecting ethnographically on interdisciplinarity, Calderbank critiques the rigid disciplinary bounds, teleological spatiotemporality, and the gendered, capitalist, and colonial schemas which inhere in the structure of Western academe. In theoretical conversation with broader post-colonial, queer, and feminist environmental studies, the piece advocates for the revitalization of imagination, as opposed to innovation — making use of the poetic form to explore the entanglements in the “oftentimes paradoxical paths to knowing,” and rejecting the primacy of science over story.

Keywords Pacific Northwest · epistemology · poetics · poetry · environmental studies · feminist studies · ecology · decolonizing

Summer 2018

Reflecting on my transition from a student of STEM to a student of anthropology, my approach explored how identity and chosen discipline coalesce within the environmental studies tradition to privilege certain modes of knowledge creation over others. During the Summer of 2018, I conducted research incubated by the University of Washington's Center for Creative Conservation (now EarthLab). This represents a brief recapitulation of my methods, theoretical findings, and arguments followed by my poetic intervention. Motivated by patterns of disciplinary divide and frustrations with gender-based discrimination within the Western academy, I asked probing questions of environmental scholars across a breadth of epistemological approaches to ecology. Following further consultation of post-colonial and feminist science and technology studies literature, I offered an epistemological provocation of my own by writing a volume of ethnographic poetry. This poetry comments on the ecology of my homeland, interdisciplinary malaise, and the prevalence of colonialism and capitalism in environmental studies. Through its artistry and commentary, this volume attempts to reckon with layered spatial entanglement and the politics of knowledge production. The process of attempting to disentangle such outlooks involved a methodology broader than a search for empirical findings. Although my realizations stemmed from observable data such as interview and literature review, many of my conclusions arrived as a result of digesting these data with regards to my own epistemological standpoint. I hold that my sensory odyssey, occurring in synchronicity with my empirical one, represents an epistemological process on-par with the rigor of absorbing facts.

Prior to my realizations and subsequent research, I understood that the common pursuit of environmental justice united all forms of ecological knowledge production. However, starting from the most nascent stages of college, I witnessed universities' mimicry of the laissez-faire market. The collegiate enterprise promises a novel experience and a lucrative, successful career to follow. Articulated by means of admissions and career guidance, institutions teach students tacitly to become productive workers equally capable of rote computation and *innovation*. University, then, seems to serve merely as a tool to become hireable at top-ranking research and technology firms. Proponents of liberalism commonly posit that through using market pressure to structure and subsequently refine the academic community, the business-backed, scientific innovation that "naturally" follows will save the world. Throughout her work, Sandra Harding, feminist science and technology studies writer, traces the concrete universality proposed by Western science. She seeks to disentangle science's origins and contingencies, eventually showing that science, as it exists now, is extremely Eurocentric and androcentric. It is based in the work of so-called enlightened men and cannot represent epistemologically the viewpoints of women or non-Europeans. Sandra Harding, a feminist science and technology writer, noted this trend towards the commodification of intellectual pursuit:

As the old saying goes, knowledge and power are intimately linked. That is nowhere more obvious than in the global political economy today... scientific innovation has moved even more firmly to the base of the contemporary economy. Whoever already owns "nature" and has access to it, whoever has the capital and knowledge to decide just how they can best access nature's resources and how such resources will be used—these are the peoples to whom the benefits of contemporary scientific and technological change largely will accrue.

—Harding, *Is Science Multicultural?*, 21

Essentially, in order to survive as an academic, even one aiming to do justice to "nature," one simply must adopt a businesslike mentality stemming from a broader paradigm of settler colonialism. However, this marketplace is not a natural phenomenon. In line with realist economics, all pursuits feed toward finding the competitive edge that will open the doors to advancement opportunities. Early in the career, internships, test scores, and hours of study, especially when backed by reputable names, bolster the value of a resume. Later, found networks, accolades, and papers published amount to the translation of knowledge into marketable solutions to problems that stress the "global" scalar façade Anna Tsing's project in *Friction* untangles.¹ These products of Western progress rhetoric manifest materially in the form of theory, synthesis of prior understandings, or design. They amount to a reputation boost for both individual and institution. Those valuable ones, as in Sandra Harding's account, backed with the most intellectual capital gain access to overarching mediation of knowledge, politics, and environments. Power structures and accepted forms of ecological knowledge are recapitulated automatically.

As a woman traversing three major potential academic epistemologies in my undergraduate years, namely oceanography, engineering, and anthropology, I noticed vast fissures separating the disciplines. As Anna Tsing notes of environmental research in *Friction*, "Experts are differently aligned."² Oceanography, and the marine sciences more generally, captured oceanic strata taxonomically. Engineering suggested an enlightenment approach fixated on self and public development as pathways to environmental wellbeing. Conversely, anthropology's narrative dissections emphasize intersecting power systems' implicit effects on layered realities. Few lines of anthropological inquiry are oriented to find a product; instead, they seek social accounts and layered ruminations. As an anthropology student, I and other anthropologists with whom I spoke consistently encounter a stark inability to communicate even a raw translation of anthropological angles at all palatable to disciplinary outsiders. Without palpable impact, it frustrates those fixated on pragmatism regardless of their stance on the social aspects of environmental justice. Tsing notes, "Anthropologists, who may speak up for forest-dwelling people, are rarely given **credence** by either foresters or biologists. [emphasis added]"³ It often seems that actions such as finding labor for underprivileged people or developing a greener product provide the most trustworthy path to ecological harmony. In such a capitalistically-structured ecosystem, people struggle to locate the ecological relevance of the social sciences, arts, and humanities.

So, perplexed by the paradigmatic paths offered to me in the environmental sciences and humanities, I dissected the discourse of environmentally-centered disciplines using climate change as a litmus test for epistemological discrepancies. In interviews with scholars of queer & feminist theory, natural science, and social science, I interrogated both the outward theories and hidden organizational lexicons of each discipline. My questioning sought three main objectives; to unravel layers of epistemic conditioning, to chronicle current climate change ruminations, and to challenge scholars think from vantages residing outside their departments. The stories told about climate change, how it came to be, and how it should be handled revealed the underlying beliefs and motives bounding the disciplines

1. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography Of Global Connection* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005).

2. *Ibid.*, 103.

3. *Ibid.*, 109.

of Western academies. They also revealed the centrality of sense of place in motivating academics to apply their research towards a perceived common ecological good.

Throughout my interviews with environmental scholars, I noticed that the very infrastructure of the academy bared uncanny resemblance with the so-called “market,” a place I once considered separate from the university. This cyclically reinforced disciplinary divide and the gendered norms. The majority of my interviewees felt that they operate squarely within their discipline of choice. They recognized hurdles to study through multiple epistemological lenses due to **language, funding, and normative barriers**. Subsequent value inscription, (gender) stereotyping, and polarization generate increasing interdisciplinary malaise; my interviewees cited also these norms as the major impetus to avoid interdisciplinary collaborations. With such a diversity of disciplines through which to interrogate relationships to space (whether it be built environment or natural landscape), it can be tough for scholars to avoid taboos in defining interdepartmental goals, especially when “ecological restoration” seems diametrically opposed to the development of “productive social order.” Policing the use of terminology absolutely marinated in specific meanings and relativities generates anxiety about the notion of consulting disciplinary others. Paralyzed by the fear of misstep, I found that researchers ruminate relentlessly within their departments while havoc blooms outside the walls of the university. The inaccessibility of the lexicons of disciplinary “others” compounds monetary gridlock, reinforcing the cycle of approaching problems in the tradition of their discipline. Although all cited goals to best navigate the Anthropocene, researchers primarily operated as workers within a company instead of as earnest, place-grounded stewards of environmental justice. Thus, climate researchers glean only a partial understanding of the ecology in question, no matter its scope.

As Timothy Mitchell notes of capitalist logics in *Rule of Experts*, careers of expertise relentlessly shroud knowledges in layers of inaccessibility.⁴ Armed by the broader capitalist paradigm, individual knower and their institutions can leverage claims to truth and promises of betterment. The fruits of such finds translate to wealth in the form of prowess, power, and product. Such an academy, in earnest pursuit of truth, fails to capture the relevance of intuitive knowledge practices and ignores discourses existing outside of accepted praxes, ensuring the permanence of a liberal development-driven societal schema. In addition to capitalist structures in the academy, stringent categories separating factual knowledge from intuitive narratives perpetuates an intellectual state obsessively structured by Western logics. The epistemological outlook carried forth by scholars in the public academy reinforces and recapitulates the starkness of these differences, often making tacit appeals to gender-encoded characterizations of the arts and humanities. These discrepancies also begged me to reorient my concept of the university system. Furthermore, older generations of successful thinkers within the contemporary academy pass on the tradition of converting intellectual capital into wealth. This cyclically reinstates, by reaffirming (unequal) material realities across racial, class, and gender lines, who counts as an expert. Students learn to leverage their knowledge to productivity under the guise of neutral knowledge creation and world betterment through development; in a Marxist sense, ideas represent fetish commodities in and of themselves.⁵

Seldom do self-proclaimed environmentalists clearly articulate which element or normative societal pattern is so irksome in terms of their nebulous mission to “save the earth.” Anna Tsing calls these disputes “‘science wars,’ the debate over whether science is a privileged form of knowledge or a political imposition.”⁶ As I suspected, my study revealed that even those whose environmentalism takes on a professional-intellectual form tend to make roots within **one** academic discipline. As such, rigid bounds inhere in the very structure of the academy. These bounds are cyclically co-produced by circulating flows of funds and the social camaraderie accompanying professional study. My epistemological examination revealed the prevailing capitalist and colonialist attitudes alive in the academy and their ramifications on environmental politics. These attitudes surfaced as I interrogated my interlocutors’ varied experiences with funding, work evaluation, and livelihood. Essentially, those projects outwardly concerned with the tangible progressions of environment garnered more support than those concerned with deliberative documentary works. **Science** and **story** were dialectically constued. Layers of insulation enveloped each department isolating each from the contributions of other environmentally-centered ways of knowing. Climate change premonitions cited by each system of world-reckoning began to reveal a multiplicity of possible futures molded by the paradigmatic decisions of our time.

Answering to the necessities of a broader capitalist network, I noted that Western intellectual institutions privileges innovative, scientific knowledge, the epitome of rational and material power, over that of the humanities and social sciences. This privilege permeates the economy of the academy and follows even as students transition to corporate laborers. One of my interviewees, a female environmental scientist, quipped that academia was “built by well-

4. Timothy Mitchell, “Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity,” 2002, 19-53.

5. Karl Marx, “The Fetishism Of Commodities,” in *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 472-9.

6. Tsing, *Friction*, 13.

off men in well-off countries before being exported to other places. Science isn't about the actualities of staying alive... When universities were built, women couldn't even own property and vote." In highlighting its narrow epistemological beginnings and expectations, she demonstrated the beginning of Western science's enforcement of a law of "oneness." This "one" way of being a scientist fails to be self-reflexive, perpetuating capitalist, colonialist, and misogynistic praxes otherwise vacant from the minds of an increasingly cosmopolitan (and globalized) citizenry. Furthermore, as in Sandra Harding's writings, the hegemony of an androcentric epistemology speaks volumes about who counts an agent of ecological truth. In the West, arguments appealing to quantitative logics receive authoritative positions and funding whereas others fall to the wayside.

A pattern emerged as I saw my personal experiences with gendered violence and capitalism reflected in my interviews with advanced scholars. Deneen Hatmaker, in her research with women engineers, utilizes the term "identity management" to signify "engage[ment] in proactive tactics to project a capable image." A woman strips themselves of outwardly gendered patterns, acting instead as a "conceptual man" in the workplace.⁷ Pressured by institutional paradigms, my interviewees alluded to engagement with "identity management" by only commenting on raw data despite citing more ethically-proximate academic goals such as societal betterment or ecological restoration. Specifically, my interviewees recalled acts of identity calibration ranging from the stringent use of quantitative language to refraining from discussion of corporeal realities like pregnancy. I too felt shame about experiencing gender-based discrimination in my time as an oceanography student. I aspired to prevent the image of victimhood from eclipsing the scientific authority I had worked diligently to gain. Essentially, researchers assume assimilation tactics in order to streamline success. As one of my interviewees quipped, these behaviors earn a woman a much-coveted "**seat at the table,**" which often seems the sole footing in ecological conversations.

As an entryway to elucidate her "friction" concept as it pertains to the sociality of science, Anna Tsing reckons with a conference of climate modelers. Her thoughts certainly agree with the problematic of gaining a "seat at the table" that my interviewee raised. Through observing the proceedings of this group of climate modelers, Tsing exposes their obsession with constructing "charismatic" epistemological images:

The model declares itself continually to be science. It is expert, neutral, rational, and empirically grounded. We know this, in part, because the model is complex and constantly under revision. It requires the computational power of computers because it integrates many factors... Experts must train as part of a "community" of model users; they must develop common standards and trust... Experts use the model to tell the public about risks; public representatives can then debate what to do about these risks. "Uncertainties", "trust", "risk": These terms circle in the model's orbit. Through them, the model both secures its place as science and stimulates debate.

—Tsing, *Friction*, 102-3

Ironically, the productive force of the model is built not out of raw data, but the constitutive interpretation of these data in line with particularly situated narratives. These narratives reaffirm the inevitability of climate change, appropriate spaces of extraction and preservation, and how ecological salvation might be engineered. In the co-production of models and predictions, the scientific method bargains with the timid environmentalist in order to give the model its affective spin. The model finds its pedagogical charm in its rote dryness. Its seriousness incites a particular kind of fear useful for generating public dismay and subsequent support of certain policy measures:

Neither botanists nor nature lovers have used globality to push potential collaborators to the negotiating table, but climate modelers do just that... Model-building practitioners are self-conscious about the effects of their models on policy makers and the public. They want to create collaborations, and they know what kind they want. They want their models to show they way to global standards and structures of management. Their models show that only such standards and structures will promote survival. The model-makers want to bring policy makers into the modeling effort. The model is an attempt to make this happen by denying pre-existing interests and identities—and thus the necessity of negotiation within the collaborations they endorse. The global unit supersedes nations, classes, cultures, or specific business interests. The model's generalizations promote negotiation by making its necessity disappear into a seamless globe... The models incorporate strategy through the forms of global Nature they delineate.

—Tsing, *Friction*, 102-3

Tsing's recollections of these modeling campaigns corroborate my ethnographic work. Certainly, the **syn-tactics** of modeling aligns with that of Western environmental science more broadly. Researchers posit their guiding schemas

7. Deneen M. Hatmaker, "Engineering Identity: Gender and Professional Identity Negotiation among Women Engineers," *Gender, Work & Organization* 20, no. 4 (2013): 382-5.

of life and non-life, limits, and taxonomies implicitly; clear data reify them. Their quantitative divinations ordain these data as the state of nature, stripping away situatedness. They affirm the scientific state's role in monitoring Nature. Throughout my research, I noted substantial strategic use of behavior and communication to bolster both the research and the researcher as a means to secure a "seat at the table." Unfortunately, these attempts often sought to correct for gender, subsuming the non-male standpoint under existing paradigms in science. These paradigms, which my interviewees asserted as products of an androcentric historical process, mask their biases by asserting their removed standards as simple neutrality. The same interviewee who termed her quest for a "seat at the table" lamented about entrapment in a cold system of social denial. Even as a professional climate modeler, she held that models inherently limited her ability to include the very concerns which initially inspired her foray into climate science. The academy implicitly maintains a stance that suggests that any inclusion of the otherwise threatens to distort scientific purity; any scientist advocating for consideration of these concealed social dynamics risks their "seat at the table." Trapped in paradox, a paradigm of **silence** and **partiality** persists.

Like the historic coal miners and modern-day petroleum dynasties, Western study inherently represents an **extractive** act. Not only is it extractive of knowledge, but it is extractive in process of our embodied and emplaced *selves*. To conduct science is to labor, and the relationship between labor and laborer exists vulnerable to abuse. It requires of us relinquishment of familial wholes, gendered and biological realities, and self to contribute to a corporation-like whole. Unlike traditional Big Business, it does it all under the banner of popular ideological purities— of **mind**, of **advancement**, of **public**, and especially of **nature**, making it much more palatable to the problem-solvers and curious brains of modernity, especially those seeking self-salvation in job security. I found these tendencies especially troubling given the context of impending climate impacts. The public university, lauded as an egalitarian philosophical project, posits a seemingly everlasting ideal of learning and community. Not only did I find the liberal monetary and labor relations unsustainable, but revealed the **teleological** temporal scheme underlying the American education extends into higher education and beyond. We learn to engage in marketing campaigns of the self in youth; this impulse only persists as university admissions, large sums of grant money, and postgraduate careers present themselves to the burgeoning ecologist. "Publish or Perish" indeed.

Although the scientific enterprise clings fast to its claim to "oneness," the social reality of environmental studies is much more entangled. Tsing's focus on friction: "Conservation inspires collaborations among scientists, business, forest dwellers, state regulators, the public and nonhumans. Through the frictions of such collaborations, global conservation projects— like other forms of traveling knowledge—gain their shape."⁸ Indeed, questions of ecology unite experts from across the spectrum of academics and politics in their co-production of knowledge. However, the Westernized environmental studies paradigm fails in its simultaneous suppression of intersubjectivity and anxious concealment of the personhood that inevitably does end up in its cherished models. Its resistance to the social, in combination with its scientific atomizing effect, shrouds its claims in an economy of dread. A temporality of anxiety haunts arguments. Tsing contends, "The common assumption is that everything can be quantified and located as an element of a system of feedback and flow."⁹ This system designs two teleological trajectories. It can point only towards doomsday or utopia. Each are equally asocial.

In recent scholarship, feminist and post-colonial environmental studies scholarship continues to provide solutions for disentangling the worthwhile elements of the academy from those that restrict thought. Throughout *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer reconciles her Western scientific and indigenous modes of knowing plants. She presents an exemplar method of study counter to academic hegemony, identity-based discrimination, and capitalist outputs.¹⁰ She does not posit indigenous knowledge as a new dispossessive venture ripe for exploitation by the Western academy, but instead as a rich epistemic of its own accord. Such an academic philosophy inherently alters the stakes of intellectual pursuit, commanding immense potential to encourage a "social" and place-emergent environmental studies.

New interventions in anthropology, philosophy, and critical theory gesture towards the "social." Eduardo Kohn advocates for the thinking, social forest.¹¹ Likewise, Anna Tsing's "friction" concept unfolds the social encounters that create the world.¹² Val Plumwood, in her classic critique of disciplinary divide, *Environmental Culture: The Economic Crisis of Reason*, looked to "new possibilities for responsible forms of science and that empower rather than disempower ethical and socially engaged perspectives."¹³ With an argument situated in environmental science

8. Tsing, *Friction*, 13.

9. *Ibid.*, 105.

10. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge And The Teachings Of Plants* (2013).

11. Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think Toward An Anthropology Beyond The Human* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2013).

12. Tsing, *Friction*.

13. Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis Of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2007), 53.

and studies, Val Plumwood presents a remarkably lucid re-imagination of the academy that better integrates diverse disciplines while acknowledging a history of bleak conceptual dealings with nature. Interestingly, Plumwood shows interest in using more narrative forms of study to reveal nature's autonomy:

... to begin with, we can turn to certain kinds of imaginative literature which write nature as agent, re-subjectivising and re-intentionalising the non-human as an ethical and intentional subject of narrative. This need not always be as radically intentionalising as Aldo Leopold's encounters with thinking mountains of Thoreau's with heraldry among the lichens, but it can still speak arrestingly of agency, learning, creativity and design among such 'spectacular beings' as *[sic]* winged dinosaurs, as in the scientific writing of Eric Rollis or the nature writing of Annie Dillard. Although these blended genres do not as yet have the prestige of 'tough' science, they can help us retell the mechanistic narratives told by reductionist science in more memorable, more generous and more helpful ways. As well as imaginative science, we need corresponding narratives that can situate humans ecologically, as in the new discipline of environmental history and in the ecological humanities more generally.

–Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 53-4

Plumwood considers welcoming and collaborative missions in the environmental studies academy crucial to fostering an ecologically-oriented academy. Such a blend of science and the eco-humanities could assist in doing epistemological justice to the realities of our interrelation with the so-called natural world. Considering the complex agency of non-human subjects in scientific storytelling would circumvent the current hegemonic ontological bounds, collapsing the singular work of many into a multi-faceted whole.

In a sense, my poetic intervention into environmental epistemology represents an attempt to revitalize **imagination** (not innovation) in the academy. I encountered a need to exit the Western essay form in order to sufficiently elucidate these environmental and epistemological entanglements. Hence, circumventing the bounds of a forwards-narrative, I transformed my methodology, recollections, and anticipations into ethnographic poetry. Returning to the verdant shores of my Pacific Northwest home, I consulted the mnemonic interworkings experts, biota, and the seemingly inert in generating the ecological sensitivity permeating environmental studies at the University of Washington. Attentive to my venture to empower diverse conceptions of being, space, and knowledge, I pondered the documentation of realms traditionally out-of-bound in academic discourse.

Certainly, the academy is frightened by the threat of overturned power dynamics that accompany imaginative reorganization. The burgeoning acceptance of stories that confound Western logic increasingly challenges the reproduction of the academy as it has been known since its colonial-capitalist inception. Deconstructing the governance of expertise, through critical vocalization of interdisciplinary malaise, institutionalized abuse, and alienating influxes of capital, is hastening a reformation. Confronting the animate chaos of what was once considered inert has the power to herald an academic apparatus that does not recapitulate the same regimes of epistemological, socioeconomic, and environmental discipline that plague environmental studies. However, horizons can only undergo revitalization if philosophies of science can relinquish their privileging of teleologic temporal trajectories and anxious obsession with purities of objectivities. Scientific practitioners must choose openness to uncertain imagination.

One might contend that poetry recapitulates the very problematic of Tsing's climate science models that the crux of my project seeks to deconstruct. Oftentimes, in presenting my outlook on this project, people assumed that my poetic end-goal was one of three things: to succinctly summarize critical theory, to document an epic narrative of my research process, or to capture the natural "sublime." Not only does the notion of an "end-goal" contradict the essence of my intervention (my poetics deny teleologic horizons); none of these three options entirely represent my work. By nature of its entanglements, the sum emerges greater than its parts.

Innovation and imagination are not the same pursuit. I did not attempt to simply translate theory or particular events into stanzas; translation obscures that which inheres in the phenomenologically and intellectually close. Instead, I allowed an alternate, polyvalent syntax itself to playfully reveal facets underlying and beyond the analytical mechanics of pure theory. Unmoored narrative foci make narratively permissible once restricted dimensions, like gender. The poetic form rendered legible the entanglements intrinsic to crisscrossing epistemologies within the environmental studies institution. Poetic space is **social**: in form, in creation, and in digestion. The lucidity of my practice flourished as I focused on the oftentimes paradoxical paths to knowing, gesturing towards an increasingly open conception of ecological awareness. My provocation is to render plausible narrative academic praxes which allow for the enunciation of manifold social and ecological realities as they exist inside of, around, and despite the intellectual hegemony of the Western academic narrative in the hopes of collaborative reimagination of spatial knowledge.

When considering an ecological situation, academics often neglect the stories either relevant to or even inherent in the data itself. When we reflect on both what these stories and these data represent, our engagement more closely approximates the whole.

References

- Harding, Sandra G. *Is Science Multicultural?: Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, And Epistemologies*. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1998.
- Hatmaker, Deneen M. "Engineering Identity: Gender and Professional Identity Negotiation among Women Engineers." *Gender, Work & Organization* 20, no. 4 (2013): 382–396.
- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge And The Teachings Of Plants*. 2013.
- Kohn, Eduardo. *How Forests Think Toward An Anthropology Beyond The Human*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2013.
- Marx, Karl. "The Fetishism Of Commodities." In *Selected Writings*, edited by David McLellan, 472–479. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009.
- Mitchell, Timothy. "Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity," 2002.
- Plumwood, Val. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis Of Reason*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *Friction: An Ethnography Of Global Connection*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005.

stumble

pragmatism lures
promises concrete in actuality
whispering contentedness in form

subsiding
with epiphany
epistemology demanding
reification via its own complexity
ingenuity & engineering
conquering masquerades as wit
to outsmart
the nature to bring forth
the comforting claw of
hierarchy
above prim ordinaries,
tales, expirations
whims circle in exchange
for one

“well-recognized by peers”

mind, ago and
in leapfrog reverse
suckling our illustrious youth
on a new destiny

soon,
child,
soon

renouncing inner “problem-solver”
turn matter in for
a verbosity not

“well-recognized by peers”

i waltz in newfound
literatures and liberations
relishing my quiet escape from
the calculus of earth-saving
stumbling upon
storytelling instead
a bloom
of perception

finally,
the tables round
relentlessly without
hierarchy
confer
disputing purposefully the
minutia of
semiotics ((non)conformist)

critiques verging on
the philosophical
of colonial powers, oil-rigs,
& nuclear hardship

belly-brew
churn inward
parlance factual & sensual
fuses in perfect integration
otherworldly, nonsensical,
against the grain,
waking only to
prophecy evils
of the forlorn Nigh

but my tongue is not

“well-recognized by peers”

clarity glistens fomenting
but partakers of
gritty premises
wait not for the answerless
our beloved
tried-and-true
hierarchy,
material,
& solution?

the frustration
 the refrain
of recapitulation
 of disbelief

migration

revolutionaries of her kind are few and far between
axiology preoccupied abstract
a commitment
accountable to realism
she fell to the
wayside

structure encourages (if not demands of her)
to stay
well within
disciplinary bounds
(otherwise risking suspect)

an economic calculus
reports that with
diligence
funding & footing

“a seat at the table”

comes easy to
those who quantify

laude thine think:
groundbreaking
awards accolades
sweet and the
greatest award of
them all:
belief.

she builds models.
innocently inconsiderate
the impact on
people's
terrestrial encounters slips
woeful speaks

expertise to this degree

(especially when
grounded in
quantities)
grants rewards
generously ordinary
act inwards

“well-recognized by peers”

returning to age-old questions
publishing in her discipline
honing in
grants
payoff

“a seat at the table.”

entice
the dynamic ones
promise of
forging a differential
a path progressive
and logical
elite

“well-recognized by peers”

methodology to
impart realities
without fear
of dispute
on grounds
of personhood
sodden

these data
resonate
savory on the
tongues of the
empowered

palatable,
these data
digest
without bellyache,
reconsideration,
guilt:
after all,

“science tells us that we must.”

in dispute and dismay

she grapples with
a reminder:

“science cannot tell you what should be,
only what is.”

thus,
culpability shines
resonates instinctual
sidelined
an elsewhere she
cannot seem to
articulate

in utilization of
tools familiar
she captures
Quantity
(not people)
(not animals)
(not spaces)
to liberate
her cranes
from the understatement
conclusions

groundbreaks

the realm of returns quips
collectively,
taunting pursuants of
solution speaking in
tongues fluent
internally derivative
prophesying pathways
ahead superhighways
oriented West a
space clear
(forged, of course, by ancestral enlightened ones (millers of steel & steam))

$$(f \cdot g)' = f' \cdot g + f \cdot g'$$

to make conversation with formulas
hard-and-fast
bartering for loopholes
all work contributing
brick-and-mortar
to evolved futures of
streamlined ease
personalized by
data-rich familiarity

& so they wax empirical
orchestrated by so-called

hardwork
humaningenuity
naturallaw

superordinate with respect to earth
ruminating on that
which leaves the
commoner perplexed
weaving
mathematica & money
to market
promises peer-reviewed
value vetted
to the masses
salvaging our celebratory life
cursed by trace air pollutants

substituting sweat
for fixes
a new security:
electric simmer
handcrafted, circuitous,

(human & mechanical)
(harmless & effortless)

rowing autonomous
reciprocally indiscernible in
mechanical grace
to the
here-and-now
statistics efficient the aficionados
clean consolations on behalf of
old animalistic
determinants

Nostalgic
now Having the time to
(choose to)be Animals

shall we reminisce new territories?

salmon cease to return
unwelcome in
trafficked streams
mediated by the
progressive pollutant, All Unknowing
remorseless and
churned up by
an academy encoded
& chasing utopia
in technical denial of
bias

(that's just how the world works)

ordinance, sustained

ordain the normalization
of disconnect

qualms conflictual
in personhood
abstracted &
cauterized as
tangential

beleaguered boundaries That-be

between
the self as an inherently emotional entity
between
the academy as a powerhouse of rationalism

no matter
relevance to systematic dynamics
no matter
infringement on material holiness

silence obstructs wholeness

unity versus wholeness

sage, she
touched
on the elegance
interstitial;
unity and *wholeness*

unity
ascribes homogeneity
consensus on a singular ruler
dictating a purity of
past & present

wholeness
opens space to
connectivity remorseless
it does not relent to
the discomfort of
disagreement
instead coming together
in spite of paradox
without compartment edict

liminal space

an academic axiom
reimagined and
reintegrated by
commitments comprised
by a slurry of

,the factual, the questionable, the sensitive,

policies without the
template reduction
entity exceeds One

finally,
archetypes cease duplicative means
forget the relegation of forms ordained

resonating whole
in a space of gratitude
and reciprocities

to our bodies as
agents and
constitutive parts

both

a ceasefire on the reputable
crisis of the sense
without end

singularity

outcast and seeking oikos
in quantitative fields

fleshing out lexicons confused complex
with systematization labyrinthine

salvation as input and output
salvation in singularity

simple, discrete, intelligible
(and thus mendable)

mechanic dictates offering
redemption trustworthy

seemingly

free of obstructions
off-limits and safe
from societal dreads

each problem equitably
matched with a fix
predictable, reasonable, true

the only necessity for success
adequate spacetime

to find ends authoritative
to tease out inconsistencies
to conclude dismissive of

paradox

the vision
with all its grandeur unfolds

palpable

bidder

solidity
vying for a footing
in a structural maze
prey to the pitfalls
of selectivity
personable
in earnest attempts to
elevate the prime

engage in marketing
campaigns of the self
rehearse cordiality
and building tall upon
ideas in-bound
collateral agreements
subordinate to the
frameworks
preexisting

O, amiable productivity
skillsets applicable
relevant and
problem-solving
meeting an expansive need
for mechanized ways

collect accolades
emblematic of
performativity. Forwards, now
a score tallied by method of rationales
evaluation approaches meaning in
contribution to
advancement
personal & academic

but these decorations
come not with
savory contextualization

disclaimers, An Addendum

no warnings given of

impending investment
a mimicry outstanding of colonial ventures

suddenly freedom to choose
success
morphs in secret
erase reticent
without
salient vigilance

while potential remains at stake

a competitive edge
of any sort
preferable to the
indulgences of livelihood
forego the novelties of softness
rescind marginal pursuits
generalize to pace demand

subtractive
coalescing

with ailments
external to science
in rationality economic
implore storybook
assimilation all-typical

a game, outside playfulness
assured
security of lifeblood
a standardizer designed
for distributive logics, stable
prerequisite practicum

material radical

minimalism (in earnest)
requires relinquishment
of benefacting artifacts
those arbitrary carriers of experience
harmless and wholly consequential
of humanity to most

to exist without
vehicular effortlessness
luxurious modesties
affront the demands
of a laboring body
unaffordable to most
under the algorithmic thumb

exit the adaptive nightmare

plastics lighten the burden
momentarily
for those tasted with
mouths to feed &
places to be
superficial &
sustaining the
American dream
in elevation of eachness

the surrender of
popular joys
in calculated exchange for
liberations circumventing
the monetary

to even consider
options of everlasting
is to come to terms
with positionality
indelibly encouraged
provided for retroactively
supplied by the laborious sins of
my past generations

i am the (brain)child of the organic act

iterative,
allotted a chance to
ruminate as an
ecological wayfarer
casting disdain on supermarket
still reliant on imported carrots

however i remain
aware & frustrated
by retorts of necessity
naturalizing a diversity of poverty
constructing class struggles
twisting realism to speak
for overconsumption's sake

selling aesthetics familial
relegating each to timeline
destinies grueling and ruinous
all for the good of offspring

groundmend

walking whimsical
path trodden
well-worn
synchronous circulation
verdant common
render reestablishment continual
sameness with soil

footfall in sinkhole
glitch in the fabric
confiding the silly secrets
all the stuff of Matter
mediate without material

spheric revelations

a place sustained
only by synergy
ants crawl without
overthinking weaving
recognition between
my toes and for
the first time

unafraid
reimagination

an extension of
my barefoot encounters
with earthliness

vegetal interlocutors
remind exemplar
of thine soil indefinite
incorporating as organelle
moss into my sense of being
coating the ground in
a green dodging tagline
verdant seal of
covenants unrooted in this temporality

nonhuman albeit
alive, communal, neither
uprooted by
mounting
fabrications of necessity

pocketknife inscription

resilience

in the arbutus tree bark

stumbling mid-trudge on
airy delight
perturbed, vexed my mind spins
wilderness whirlwind
contemplative, unbounded
looping arcs
labor, humanness, naturalization
critique relents not to pragmatism

open vulnerabilities
to debates civilized
by rights & ratio
Aristotelian
function arguments
attempt to make
amends with
Monoculture

the pace of
commodification
exhaustive tired
relentless
mistaking abundance
for infinity
an everlasting
hunger for yonder
seeking diligent venture
into uncharted
territories
only to conquer
Nature (timber to quantum)

through discovery
through intellectualization
through incorporation
eventual

paths may be straying
interrupted alas by roads
decided on behalf
by governance prudent
blazing forwards, upwards

forecast

projected

premonitions
pinpoint Futures
numb, anticipatory

weary
critiques observatory
only
despite disaster

as if
intellectual
mastery
over consequence
frightened
could negate
bitter subjugation
to creeping Befores

plotting trend lines
of death & destruction
Anxious Geometries
tracing faultless
fascinated bystander
to the fate of
populous

Expand,
charting the fate of
heat-stressed lizards
perhaps to stumble
upon a way out
and around the
terrors sour

claim authorship
overwrite
our own
eschatology

interstices

reject aim

And structure

beckoning reorientation
glorious confusion
disturbs acceptance

dissolution of material assurance
ownership
questionable

process escapes the confines of trajectory

nonlinear harmonics
untouchable palpability
release in richness

holding fast to fluidity
looking to liminals

consistent in reawakening
flexibility to raise qualms
unattached to popular conceit

directionality obscured
denying the clever power of
teleology

seeking everlasting bounce
in opposition to definition

gentle

reconciliation

discrete curricula do nothing for wholeness
knowledge propagates in mutuality
pyramidal sustained by
reciprocal equalization
weighty pushes align
a conceptualization
postcolonial
democratic

the Rational

uncanny in ability to tickle the miniscule
uniting diversities in a language of
one
generating contributive ethos
methodology of diligence
focus on honesty
charming integrity of natural
but
hinged entrepreneurial on product
traction measured in funds

our knowledge incomplete until balanced
with and against deliberations of plausible others
in avoidance of succumbing to orthodoxy

the Relational

joyful in embrace of paradoxical circles
considerate slowness appealing to a
whole
discourse without pretenses of neutrality
unlimited by production mentality
fascinated by lexicon
reflexive rebounding in responses
but
fluidity eluding application
often impenetrable to policy

co-creation of knowledge
epistemologically whole
blurring expertise unwarranted
and ontological hegemony of privilege
staking claim soberly (only to nothing)
ample in alternative and epitomizing the horizontal